8. Those who are entitled to the bride price

It is apparent from everything we have said that the bride price is placed in the possession of the father of the woman for whom it has been paid. In his absence it goes to his eldest brother or, if his brother has settled there and inherited the father's authority, he is the one to receive the bride price of his niece (cousin in our terms). Otherwise it goes to the eldest son. In short, the rights to a bride price are passed down in the order of the family hierarchy.

The mother's clan receives the copper spirals, the goat, and certain of the befongo. [176]

There are circumstances, however, under which this order can be destroyed so that the father's clan does not get the slightest portion of the bride price. This happens if the daughter who is to be married has left her father's clan for a sufficiently good reason and has been adopted by her mother's family. The following is a historic example of such a case:

The events took place at Bompɔ́ma (Inj6l6) between 1890 and 1900. One of the inhabitants, Ilɔ̂njɔ́ yâ Nɔombɔ̂la had had two children by his wife, Eale of Bokɔ́ndɛ̂la (Bɔ́ngɛ́): a boy, Mpulɔ́ndɛ́ɛ and a girl, Ɛmbɔ̂mbi. The girl was abducted by one of the black soldiers who had come to occupy the region and was taken by him to his native village, somewhere near Coq. The wife of another man from Bompɔ́ma, named Isɔ̂mulu, was carried off and taken away by another soldier. Ilɔ̂njɔ́ owed Isɔ̂mulu a dog. The latter took advantage of the disorder caused by the beginning of the occupation to demand his due with violent threats. Ilɔ̂njɔ́, having no dog and probably frightened, handed his son over to his creditor. Isɔ̂mulu hastened to find the soldier who had taken his wife and offered to give the latter the slave boy in exchange for her. The pair came to an agreement, and the soldier took away the boy, who died in his master's hands in a manner unknown to me.

Still during the time of the Independent State, Ɛmbɔ̂mbi was able to make her way back to her country. Passing her mother's village, she heard how her father had acted toward her brother Mpulɔ́ndɛ́ɛ. Indignant, she decided not to continue on her way; she

declared that she was breaking with her father and wished instead to live at the home of her maternal uncle Isfia. After a time, a certain Belekí came to ask for her in marriage and paid the bride price to Isfia.

In 1922, Ilónjó went to Boiéndele and presented a complaint to Chief Efóle against Isfia, because the latter had taken his daughter's bride price. Efóle, assisted by the messenger Bongimí and by notables, decided in favor of the accused: Since the plaintiff had gravely offended his daughter by delivering her brother into [177] slavery, which resulted in his death, he first had to be reconciled with her. If she accepted his apologies, the father would receive her bride price. They agreed on the nature of the reconciliation gift (bofúnde): Ilónjó would pay a goat. Since he did not have it with him he handed over his knife as a pledge (wéko). Iomí, the bómankómí of Isfia (who by then had died), promised to make restitution of the bride price and in anticipation paid 12 rings and 3 knives. Ilónjó went back home. They awaited him in vain; they did not see him again -- neither him nor his goat.

Act three: February, 1933. Efóle, Bongimí, and the rest had been removed as a result of a reorganization of districts. Bokwéla had been made chief of the Bofúngí. The district tribunal began to function again, and our Ilónjó took advantage of the situation and recommenced his attack. He brought complaint against Iomí and against Isfia's brother, Engongolo, who was not there in 1922 but who now had returned home. On March 6, 1933 the palaver was settled. Naturally, the men who newly held their authority found this a good opportunity to strengthen their position and did the exact opposite of their predecessors. They condemned Iomí and Engongolo and decided in favor of Ilónjó.

Here we see a real abuse of power. For according to Nkundó law, only Ilónjó was in the wrong. He had conducted himself badly all the way down the line. His daughter had no obligation to recognise him as father, since he had virtually disowned her in the first place. And her mother's clan could have, even should have, received the bride price (see also the case described in Chapter IX, Article IV).

currency, but in articles on which the natives fix a conventional price, usually much higher than the actual value. Thus, for instance, a pataki, or pinon rifle, was always reckoned at 3,000 mitako; it did not matter that it was only worth 1,500. There are, [546] therefore, only very few women who are paid for with okesi in real currency or mitako.

The tragic result of this exaggerated rise in prices is that the mutual debts and difficulties among the natives have been increased, so that they are almost impossible to solve. In the attempt to settle a dispute, five other disputes come into it, all equally complicated, for the simple reason that the money, the mitako, to be paid does not exist, and it is forbidden to pay with women. To settle a dispute, several months are sometimes necessary, or a whole year. Other disputes never end, but pass on from father to son and are brought by each one in turn before each new District Administrator. In the districts where the bride price has not been raised, the difficulties and disputes are not nearly as numerous and are easy to solve. In the districts where the purchase price and the bride price of the women have become excessively high, the natives themselves admit that their disputes could formerly be solved easily, but that this is at present almost impossible.

It is unnecessary to say that this situation is harmful to the task of civilizing [the country] and to the mutual good relations of the natives. The natives are constantly coming to the District Administrator of the area to lay before him their disputes over women who have not been paid for. These disputes take up a great deal of the costly time of the administrator. He must hear and settle these usually very complicated disputes, for often the general peace of a village or district depends on it.

Also the natives themselves spend whole days and weeks doing nothing besides holding meetings to discuss the unpayable debts of bride price and the purchase price of wives, simply because the prices are excessive. For lack of currency, they pay each other with each other's debts, which usually complicates the business even more.

To improve this condition, the price of women and the bride price should be lowered, greatly lowered. We have seen that this was possible and practical when once a District Administrator who knew the native customs very well in the area of Coquilhatville really began to do it.